



Rabbi Shmuel Hanagid lived in Spain during the Golden Age which preceded the terrible Inquisition. The son of a spice merchant, his brilliance attracted the attention of a scribe named Elisaf who took the boy in as an apprentice. Under the tutelage of the scribe, Shmuel learned the Hebrew and Arabic languages and became an accomplished scribe and copyist of manuscripts. Soon his services were in great demand, and people flocked to his door with their poems, documents and manuscripts of every description.

Shmuel developed his skills to a fine degree and also became learned in Jewish law and Agada. He devoted half of his time to Torah study and the other half to his profession and the study of the natural sciences.

Eventually, his reputation became known to the king of Granada, Habus ibn Machsán. The king took him into his service, first as royal scribe and advisor, and then, when his talents became apparent, as his prime minister and general of his armies.

Shmuel Hanagid grew in power and wealth, but he never forgot his origins and never forgot that he was above all, a Jew, devoted to G-d and the Torah. He still found time to continue the practice of penmanship and he even wrote poems in praise of the art to which he owed his high position.

Among his most prized possessions was a small Torah scroll which he had written for himself. He carried this Torah with him into every battle.

Rabbi Shmuel had sons whom he imbued with a love of the scribal arts. At the age of only eight his son Joseph was accomplished enough to copy his father's book of poetry, entitled Minor Psalms. Another son, Elisaf, copied his second book Minor Proverbs at the age of six. It had been Shmuel's intention to give his third book, Minor Ecclesiastes to his son Judah to copy, but tragically, the boy passed away before he could accomplish the task. His heartbroken father copied the work himself and dedicated it to his beloved son.

During the years in service to the king, Rabbi Shmuel fought many successful battles. During one battle, he lost the manuscript of his third book, Minor Ecclesiastes, which deeply upset him. When he retired from his wars, Rabbi Shmuel Hanagid settled down to his study and his manuscripts. It was not long before Torah students from all over came to him complaining about the great dearth of books. Of course, the printing press had yet to be invented, and books were reproduced by hand-copying.

Rabbi Shmuel responded with a brilliant solution: he established a school for scribes in his own home. Soon copies were appearing throughout the Jewish world. Rabbi Shmuel made sure that these copies were bound beautifully, befitting the holiness of their contents. Torah study received a great boost due to this increase in learning materials.

So many applicants arrived to learn the art of copying that Rabbi Shmuel developed a method of ascertaining the character of the person standing before him. He would ask the person for a sample of his handwriting and from that he could tell what kind of person he was. One day a man came and asked to be admitted into his school. As was his way, Rabbi Shmuel asked for a sample of his writing. At once he declared, "You are a plagiarist!" The man was shocked to hear Rabbi Shmuel's pronouncement, but he was honest enough to readily admit his guilt. In response to the man's admission Rabbi Shmuel replied, "I am glad to hear that you admit your wrongdoing. I am sure that you can mend your ways, and I will admit you to my school if you promise to forswear committing the same act." Of course, the man gladly agreed and became one of Rabbi Shmuel students.

Many years later, that same student came to Rabbi Shmuel with a manuscript of the Tractate Baba Metziah which he had copied. Rabbi Shmuel was pleased and remarked

that it was obvious that the man had truly mended his ways. The man broke down in tears of joy. He then took his bag of manuscripts and presented one of them to his teacher. To his utter amazement, it was a copy of his lost manuscript Minor Ecclesiastes.

The former student explained that he had met a man who boasted of having written a book of wonderful poetry, and proceeded to recite them. Rabbi Shmuel's student recognized them as the work of his master. He carefully memorized them and then lovingly and faithfully transcribed them. Now, he was presenting the volume to the true author, Rabbi Shmuel Hanagid, who couldn't have been more pleased. He knew for certain that his student had reformed completely and he now had his precious manuscript back in his possession.

Adapted from Talks and Tales

THOUGHTS THAT COUNT

on the weekly Torah portion

When you take a census...every man shall give G-d an atonement for his soul. This shall they give...half a shekel, after the shekel of the Sanctuary (Exodus 30:12-13)

Why did G-d command the Jews to give half a shekel and not a whole one? To show that by himself, the Jew is only "half" and thus incomplete -- the other half consisting of either G-d Himself or another Jew. Both interpretations, however, are interdependent one on the other. (*The Rebbe*)

Moshe could not understand how money can accomplish forgiveness for the soul. G-d showed Moshe a fiery coin which weighed a half-shekel, and He explained that a coin by itself cannot atone for a grave sin. However, if one gives with warmth and enthusiasm that comes from the fiery core of the Jewish soul, then a coin can truly become the cause of forgiveness. (*Likutei Sichot*)

The shekel is an allusion to the soul; the gematria (numerical equivalent) of "shekel" is the same as for "nefesh" (soul). Every Jew is given "half" of his soul from Above; his obligation is to elevate the other "half" under his control to the same level as the first, through serving G-d and performing good deeds.

The rich shall not give more, and the poor shall not give less than half a shekel (Ex. 30:15)

The above verse can also be interpreted to mean "the rich will not be increased, and the poor will not be lessened." The wealthy person must realize that he will not increase his fortune by being miserly. Similarly, a poor person will not become poorer if he gives to charity. (*Imrei Shefer*)



5:34 Candle Lighting Time

NY Metro Area
21 Adar/March 5
Torah Portion Ki Tisa
Parshat Para
Shabbat ends 6:34 PM

L'Chaim

בס"ד

1663

21 Adar, 5781

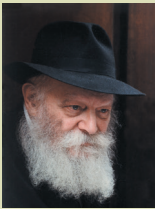
March 5, 2021

The Weekly Publication for Every Jewish Person

נוסד תוך ימי השלושים

Dedicated to the memory of Rebbetzin Chaya Mushka Schneerson

"Unveil my eyes, that I may perceive the wonders of Your Torah." (Psalm 119:18)



LIVING WITH THE REBBE

from the teachings of the Rebbe on the Torah portion

This week's week's Torah portion is *Ki Tisa*. We also read an extra portion about the *para aduma*, the red heifer. If someone comes in contact with a dead body, they have to be purified by being sprinkled with water mixed with the ashes of the red heifer. About this *mitzva* (commandment) the Torah says "*Zot chukat haTorah*," "This is the decree of the Torah." Meaning, there is something about this *mitzva* which is central to Torah and its observance.

This *mitzva* is a "*chok*," a *mitzva* whose rationale is beyond human comprehension and is done just because it is G-d's will.

What are some lessons that we can take from this *mitzva* that affect Jewish life and observance?

The first lesson is, that we must be alive. Our attitude, outlook and focus must be positive and alive. Some see Torah as a bunch of rules, telling them what they can't do. To them, Torah becomes a miserable ball and chain, which they lug around. Some even take pride in this form of misery, "look at how miserable I am for G-d." This is not living. The Torah wants us to purify ourselves from even contact with death. To live with Torah, is to see the positive purpose and mission, that G-d has given to us. Instead of a ball and chain, Torah becomes wings with which you can soar. *Mitzvas* become a joy to do. Even the negative commandments are kept out of joy and positivity. You get to be Hashem's messenger to do these things.

Another thing we can learn from the red heifer, is that its reason is beyond human comprehension. We only do it, because it is G-d's will. Same could be true about all the *mitzvas*, even the ones we do understand, we can and should do them for a higher purpose, because it is G-d's will. This makes our seemingly mundane actions meaningful too.

Being unable to do anything for myself, I see more than ever, how simple actions can be meaningful and G-dly. Just sitting, keeping me company, is so precious to me.

This perhaps, is the most important lesson of all. It is easy to see prayer, Torah study, tefillin, Shabbos candles, etc. As G-dly. To G-d, our most mundane act can be G-dly. This is especially true when we show kindness to one another, and what is more G-dly than that.

Adapted by Rabbi Yitzi Hurwitz from the teachings of the Rebbe, yitzihurwitz.blogspot.com. Rabbi Hurwitz, who is battling ALS, and his wife Dina, are emissaries of the Rebbe in Temecula, Ca.

Butterflies are Free

Snout, Dog-face, Milbert's, Karner Blue, Peacock, Buckeye. You're probably wondering what kind of a list this is. These names are a few of the thousands of butterfly species around the world.

Butterflies, those delicate, fragile, winged-insects, are probably among the most graceful and elusive creatures around. They seem to glide effortlessly through the air, mesmerizing adults and teasing children.

Some people collect butterflies, or butterfly decorations; others simply appreciate seeing them in nature; still others plant flowers in their gardens specifically to attract butterflies. But regardless of our disposition toward the common monarch or its more exotic relatives, we are often amazed that this exquisite creation finds its beginnings in a boring, colorless cocoon.

Butterfly aficionados claim that butterflies grow on you. You chase them as a child, later in life you contentedly watch their peaceful flight, or maybe even seek-out their cheerless cocoons. Later yet, your home becomes full of butterfly themed knickknacks.

Do you know anyone who collects butterfly "things?" It often starts for no specific reason; it's not that the person feels a particular connection to butterflies.

It might start with an off-hand comment showing appreciation for a piece of jewelry in the shape of a butterfly. From then on, the word is out: "If you want to get so-and-so something, you can buy her anything with butterflies on it."

Mitzvot (commandments), if you think about it, are very similar to butterflies.

Mitzvot. All *mitzvot*, from the simplest to the most exotic, are beautiful, graceful, winged-creatures. When performed with love, they fly effortlessly to the Heavens, bringing word of our good deeds and devotion.

Some *mitzvot* seem to be so elusive. From a distance we watch others do them; we notice that doing a *mitzva* brings inner contentment. But, we wonder, wouldn't we look a bit silly - like a child chasing butterflies - to go after the *mitzva* ourselves?

And so, we content ourselves with just appreciating other people's collections of *mitzvot*, certain that we could never gather such a fine grouping, such rare varieties, such exquisite specimens.

But we are mistaken. Each Jew can collect his own *mitzvot*, even if he starts out with just a simple, common one - like putting a penny in a charity box each day.

One of the most amazing things about *mitzvot* is that they often seem to come packaged in dull, mundane "cocoons." After all, what's so exciting about putting on tefilin? What's so spiritual about not mixing milk and meat? What's so exotic about lighting Shabbat candles? But if we're patient and persevere, we see the *mitzva* begin to grow and change - and we see ourselves metamorphose. Together with the one *mitzva*, and the many other *mitzvot* that can follow in its wake, we become that graceful creature - pleasing to G-d, pleasing to ourselves, and pleasing to others.

And *mitzvot*, like butterflies, are free.

Dedicated in memory of a dear friend of the
Lubavitch Youth Organization
Mr. David Yagoda OBM

SLICE OF LIFE

One Summer, An Entire Lifetime

by Rabbi Zushe Abelsky



“Father, tell me about growing up in Moldova. Did you go to synagogue when you were little? Did you attend a Jewish school?”

Many children ask their parents questions about their childhood and what life was like “in the olden days.”

And so, when asked by one of his daughters, Yigal Mikhnovsky – who now lives in Israel with his wife and children – thought back to his formative years. He especially remembered how one special summer changed the course of his life.

Some background information first: In 1989, Rabbi Zalman and Leah Abelsky moved from Israel to Moldova. Already in their 60s, when most people would be at least starting to think about their retirement, the Abelskys settled in Kishinev to be emissaries of the Rebbe. Mind you, this was in the early years of glasnost, before the official collapse of the Soviet Union.

Yigal shared with his children, “I grew up in

Kishinev, Moldova, which until 1991 was part of the USSR. In the summer of 1994 I attended a Gan Israel summer camp. What I learned and experienced in that one short summer affected me – and you – forever.”

Yigal was introduced to *mitzvot* (commandments) and Jewish teachings that he had never before known about. One of the mitzvot that he and a number of the other young boys decided to keep is that of *brit mila* (circumcision). As Yigal was regaling his children with the fun times of that summer, he remembered that a rabbi from America who was a mohel flew in a helicopter to the camp to perform the circumcisions. Twenty boys in all fulfilled the commandment of brit mila.

“But something doesn’t make sense,” Yigal told his children, quite perplexed. Now, as an adult, he of course knew that one can’t fly from the U.S.A. to Moldova in a helicopter! What was that all about?

Yigal remembered the name of one of camp counselors from so many years earlier. He knew that the counselor was living in Israel. And so he searched until he found him. A joyous reunion took place when Dubi and Yigal saw each other for the first time in over 25 years.

Here is what Dubi shared: “That summer, there were 20 of us guys who came from Israel and America to be counselors in Moldova. We flew to Kiev, and from there we took a train to Kishinev. In the group of counselors there were two guys who spoke Russian and I was one of them. I remember that each of the Americans brought with them a suitcase filled with kosher meat and a suitcase filled with candy and prizes. All of these were extremely special treats for the boys in the camp.

“Now imagine, in the streets of Kishinev in 1994, guys dressed like Orthodox Jews, speaking in English, singing out loud Jewish songs, proud to let everyone know that they were Jewish. We were not afraid of anything,

we were fearless. Passers by were startled by us. In the newspapers they even wrote about such a phenomenon.

“The boys in the summer camp greedily yearned for religion. We studied with them the Mishna, Torah, Hebrew. On Shabbat we made kiddush and sang Shabbat songs together. We taught the children that they must love, help and support one another. A large percentage of the campers were from single parent homes.

“The boys didn’t know the prayers or the basics of how to pray. We explained to them that one should always be joyous. That we need to ask G-d for whatever we need and whatever we want. That we must wish everyone, who is now here, in the camp, only well. After all, he is your brother! If he succeeds, you succeed as well.

“Rabbi Zalman Abelsky took upon himself all of the expenses of the camp. For the brit mila, Rabbi Abelsky brought in Rabbi Abraham Kahn from America.” With a twinkle in his eyes, Dubi admitted, “To be honest, I don’t remember that Rabbi Kahn arrived in a helicopter! Perhaps to get the boys excited and make them less anxious about the circumcision we arranged for the mohel to arrive by helicopter?”

Yigal shared, “The time I spent in the Jewish camp in Kishinev became a very important experience for me and a source of unforgettable impressions. It is as if we had arrived on another planet! I remember that summer warmly.”

The passion for Judaism that was ignited in Yigal that summer continued to grow. He eventually enrolled in a yeshiva and even received Rabbinic ordination. Today he has his own photography and videography studio, and is sought after for his high quality work at weddings and other celebrations. Yigal also “gives back” by volunteering with teens at risk. And it all began in the summer of 1994 in Camp Gan Israel, Kishinev.

The Rebbe Writes

from correspondence
of the Lubavitcher Rebbe

10th of Nissan, 5741 [1981]

To all the Participants in the International Symposium on Jewish Mysticism Sponsored by the Lubavitch Foundation London, England

I was pleased to be informed of the upcoming Symposium on Jewish Mysticism, and extend prayerful wishes for its success. And success, or rather *hatzlacha* [success] in its true Jewish concept, is rooted in the Torah, which insists on the primacy of action – “the essential thing is the deed.”

Mysticism, in general, has a variety of connotations, but Jewish mysticism must necessarily be defined in terms of specific topics that have to do with the *nistar* [hidden] of Torah – one of the two primary facets of the Torah: *nigleh* [revealed] and *nistar*, the revealed and the hidden.

Needless to say, there can be no dichotomy between the two, because it is One Torah, given by One G-d, to the “one people on earth.”

According to the Baal Shemtov’s interpretation, the words “one people on earth” allude to the mystic nature of the Jewish soul that is endowed with the capacity to reveal the oneness in the multiplicity of earthly things.

Jewish mysticism teaches that the purpose of the soul’s descent to earth is to reveal the harmony that is inherent in the created world, beginning with the small world, namely, man – a creature of *nigleh* and *nistar*, of a body and soul. Inner personal peace and harmony can be achieved only through the supremacy of the soul over the body, since in the nature and scheme of things, the body can be made to submit to the soul – willingly, and in the case of the true mystic even eagerly; but never vice versa.

Jewish mysticism helps to realize the said purpose of the soul by teaching it how to recognize the spirituality of matter, and that in every physical thing, even in the inanimate, there is a “soul,” which is the creative force which has created it – a being out of non-being – and continuously keeps it from reverting back to its former state of non-existence.

It is this “spark” of G-dliness that is the true essence and reality of all things, and this spark is released and revealed when physical matter is used for a sublime purpose or deed in accordance with the Will of the Creator, as, for example, in the performance of a *mitzva* [commandment] (*tefilin* made of leather, etc.).

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One of the aspects of Chabad is to reveal and expound the esoteric aspects of the Torah and mitzvot so that they can be comprehended by the three intellectual faculties – *chochma*, *bina*, *daas* [wisdom, understanding, knowledge], and reduced to rational categories, down to the actual performance of the mitzvot, showing how, in the final analysis, G-d can be “comprehended” better by action (the performance of mitzvos) than by meditation, which is one of the cardinal differences between Jewish and non-Jewish mysticism.

As we are about to celebrate Pesach [Passover], the Festival of our Freedom, we are reminded that *yetzias Mitzrayim* [the exodus from Egypt] (in the sense of *metzarim*, constraints) is a continuous process of Jewish living, gaining an evergrowing measure of true freedom through the everyday experience of Torah and mitzvos with emphasis on actual deed.

as “a feast unto the L-rd”? Actually, we see that his words were prophetic, as the day on which the Golden Calf was made (and the Tablets of the Law subsequently broken by Moses) was the 17th of Tammuz: Although in our times that date is observed by fasting, when Moshiach comes it will be transformed into “a time of joy and gladness, and a cheerful feast to the house of Judah” (*Zachariah 8:19*). (*Maayana Shel Torah*)

A WORD FROM THE DIRECTOR

According to Jewish law, we begin studying the laws of an upcoming holiday 30 days before that holiday begins. Last week, we celebrated the holiday of Purim, which precedes Passover by 30 days. Thus, in a very practical sense, Purim and Passover, and all of the days in between, are connected.

In addition to Purim and Passover being connected, they also have something very important in common. Jewish children had a great influence on what happened to the entire Jewish people at both of those times in Jewish history.

Concerning Purim, the Midrash tells us that Haman’s wicked decree was abolished in the merit of the Torah study and prayers of the Jewish children. G-d accepted their pure and heartfelt prayers and brought about the Purim redemption. Regarding Passover, the Talmud tells us that despite the bitter slavery they endured, the Jewish people raised a very special generation of children. This is best illustrated by what happened at the splitting of the Sea. Our Sages teach that the children recognized G-d first – even before the adults.

What significance does all of this have for us today?

Since Passover is the time of freedom and redemption, Jewish children and the Jewish child within each one of us must use these days between Purim and Passover to prepare for Passover in a manner that shows true “freedom.” This can be accomplished by freeing ourselves of our limitations (the Hebrew word for “limitation” – “*maytzarim*,” is etymologically related to “*Mitzrayim*” – “Egypt”). We will then be able to fulfill mitzvot with joy and tranquility.

The Talmud states that in the month of Nisan we were redeemed (from Egypt) and in the month of Nisan we will be redeemed once again.

Let us not have to wait another two weeks until Nisan, but rather, may we be redeemed immediately through Moshiach, NOW!

Shmuel Belman

L’ZICHRON CHAYA I MUSHKA לזכרון חיה י מושקה

The name of our publication has special meaning. It stands for the name of Rebbetzin Chaya Mushka Schneerson (obm), wife of the Rebbe.



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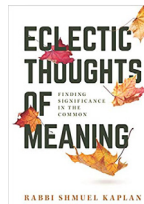
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New Emissaries

Rabbi Avraham and Mushka Minsky are establishing Chabad of Newark, New Jersey. The offices will be located at the Robert Treat Center. In addition to working with local Newark residents, the Minsky’s will intend to reach out to Jewish students who are at colleges and universities in Newark.

Eclectic Thoughts of Meaning

Eclectic Thoughts of Meaning, by Rabbi Shmuel Kaplan, contains just over 200 brief essays addressing topics of interest to any reader in search of a more meaningful life. The essays share the Torah view on everyday life and how everything leads to a purpose, a meaning and a lesson. Rabbi Kaplan and his wife Rochel have been emissaries of the Rebbe in Maryland for over 40 years. *Eclectic Thoughts of Meaning*, published by Ktav Publishing, originates in Rabbi Kaplan’s written communication with his community.



Today Is...

26 Adar II

All that is holy in the nation of the G-d of Abraham and fundamental for the House of Israel, in raising and educating an upright generation, regarding the kosher status of food and the lofty purity of the holiness of Shabbos, was entrusted by G-d to Jewish women to guard and to cultivate. About a woman who fulfills her calling in the area of family life, directing her household according to the Torah, the verse says, “The wisdom of a woman builds her home.”

MOSHIACH MATTERS

“Aaron called out and said, ‘A feast unto the L-rd is tomorrow’ ” (*Ex. 32:5*) How could Aaron, who was extremely righteous, have lied by referring to the making of the Golden Calf